

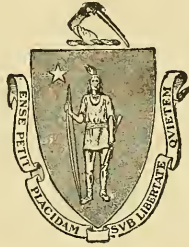
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ON

THE COUNTRY CHURCH

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Volume 3

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BASIS FOR SOCIAL EVANGELISM WITH RURAL APPLICATIONS.

By GRAHAM TAYLOR.

The church of any faith is primarily inspirer, interpreter and mediator. As such, it stands in between four pairs of things vital to every individual and every community.

1. First of all, standing between what ought to be and what is, between the ideal and the actual, the church interprets each to every one of us. It inspires us with discontent for what we are and have, and with aspiration to desire and attain the higher and better thing revealed.

This it does by giving us a vision of the worthiest things and by getting us to look up to them and reach out after them in worship. For worship is worth-ship. It is the aspiration of the human for the divine. But to inspire us with it, the church must interpret human life and conditions as they actually are. It must begin by having and giving an intelligent and sympathetic understanding of what now is. There is little use of telling any of us what we ought to be, without first giving us to understand that the church and the preacher know how it is with us now and here.

It is because people fail to feel that the church has to do with what now most concerns them, with where they now are, with how they are to do in this world, that religion seems irrelevant to them, seems to be something out of their reach or foreign to them, seems to be something they can get along without, at least in their present emergencies and daily tasks.

A coal-cart teamster once drew his team up to the curbstone in order to hail me as I passed, with this question: "Are you the man who spoke about religion on the streets yesterday?" When I admitted that I had done so, he remarked, "Well, it is a good thing to bring religion outdoors." It surprised him to find it there. Out in the real world, where he lived, on the streets in which he earned his living, religion had not seemed to belong, but it seemed more real to him for being there. To make religion real then, the church must root it on the common earth, however heaven-high it holds aloft the divine ideal. In local surveys of actual conditions, village improvement and town planning the church should take its own part. Only when we mortals get the idea that religion belongs out in the open, under the stars, on the green earth, will it be the real, living, tangible thing to us, like everything else that lives and grows, above, about, within us.

2. The Church also stands between life and livelihood. It has ever placed the sanctity of religion upon each individual life. It has hedged about every life, of man, woman and child with a sacredness which God Almighty protects and man disregards at his peril. Even the unborn babe has rights which the mother is bound to respect, since religion made infanticide a crime.

But too much and too long the Church has left livelihood alone, until many ways by which we earn our living make it difficult and sometimes impossible to live the religious life. Ways of livelihood must therefore be made at least compatible with and not destructive of the "Way of Life," if the Church is to get and keep people in it. Therefore commerce and trade, conditions of labor, safeguarding women's work and children's right to play and learn, and the relations between employers and employes must be invested with a religious ideal. People must be convicted of their economic sins, must be brought to industrial repentance, must be converted and become Christian in their business and work-a-day lives if religion is to be a real part of every one's life.

If Christianity does not or cannot interpret itself in the terms of economic values and in the terms of industrial relationships, then it is not and cannot be the religion for an industrial age. But it is so interpreting itself as never before. It has created the prevailing discontent with lower conditions. It has inspired the demand for higher standards of living. And it will not cease until our way of making a living is not only consistent with, but tributary to the Way of Life.

This means that it is the religious duty of the Church to take and impart an interest in making farming more profitable, the country school more effective, the roads better, the farm-houses healthier and more convenient, the family life on the farm and in the rural town happier and cheerier, the private and public recreation and amusements more attractive and wholesome. Thus only will the countryside hold its young people and retain its population. Thus only will farming and the business of the country town be kept prosperous. Thus only will the Church itself prosper.

3. Again the Church stands between the one and the many, to make the interest of each one the concern of all, and the common interests the concern of each. This needs to be done especially in the country. Farm life isolates. It is easier to detach one's self and live to one's self in the country than in the city. But the detached individual, the detached family, the detached community, the detached nationality, are

always in danger. They are in danger not only of being selfish, but of losing interest in themselves and their own progress. As we mingle with one another we gain self-respect, ambition, public spirit, and become more normal. One person is no person. Life is made up of its relationships. Every one of us is for the most part what others have made us. The community makes the citizen, and just as surely shapes the child.

So also the citizen helps make the community what it is. One class helps another and yet is helped by it. Trade makes the town, yet the town makes the trade. Those who think only of building up their trade and let the community—its school and Church, its health and recreation—run down, are taking care of their own interest with one hand, while they are pulling the ground out from under them with the other hand.

The old Bible is right therefore in proclaiming, "No man liveth unto himself." It follows therefore that it is neither enterprising nor public-spirited, neither to our own interests nor to those of our town or neighborhood to say, "I am in business for myself," "I can do what I please with my own."

Religion strikes the balance between each one's duty to himself and to others, each one's self-interest and interest in others. It identifies them. So the Church, especially in the country, should inspire the community spirit, should interpret the ways in which each of its members, and all of them together, can promote the prosperity and pleasure, the peace and progress of the community. If the community is to be for the Church, the Church must be for the community.

This lays upon the churches the duty of thinking more of their communities than of themselves. The Church should think less of building itself up out of the community than of building the community up out of itself.

This means that where there are too many churches in any one community, some of them should sacrifice themselves by joining with others to make fewer and stronger churches. This they should do not only for the sake of the community, but quite as much for the sake of the common cause which they profess to serve. Why should there not be community church buildings and community church memberships, constituting only so many church centers as can be strong and can serve the community best? If they cannot unite to worship together, or to confess one common creed, or form a single organization, why cannot all the churches of a community federate to do together the things which the people need, and which the churches working apart can neither fur-

nish nor secure? Thus only in many a town and neighborhood can good schools be sustained, clean and attractive amusements be provided, a happy advancing social life be promoted—all of which are as tributary to religion as religion should be tributary to them.

4. Last of all, the Church stands between personal religion and local government, between piety and politics, to mediate between them; not so much to keep the peace, because there ought often to be war, but to make piety express itself in politics, to bring personal religion to the protection and promotion of the local government. The divorce between them is fatal to each. The Church can no more succeed if the local government fails than it can succeed if the Church fails. They stand and rise, or fall together.

Neither country churches nor country communities succeed unless they help each other to the success which only teamwork can bring. Politics is as sacred as religion, because it should be a part of religion itself. But we have been talking of "dirty politics," as though taking part in government was itself defiling. It is because we have only taken part in party politics, instead of government itself, that all our local governments have so long been inefficient, if not corrupt. It is because we have thus let dirty men rule and ruin our politics. It is because clean men do not fulfil their citizenship.

There needs to be a religious revival of civic patriotism. The churches can stir it up, or pray it down, without being partisan. They have a right to be thus patriotic. Their ministers have the right and duty to be statesmanlike.

Of course, it will cost a cross for the churches to be and do all this. There will be some temporary loss, but greater permanent gain. But if they take not up their cross—their cross of civic, social, industrial self-denial—they can neither follow nor be worthy of their Master. If they are not willing thus to lose their life, they cannot find it. Until they bear their cross they will not wear their crown.

Liberty H. Bailey, as quoted in *The Survey* magazine from *Rural Manhood*, thus sums it all up:

In some great day
The Country Church
Will find its voice
And it will say:

“I stand in the fields
Where the wide earth yields
Her bounties of fruit and grain;
Where the furrows turn
Till the plowshares burn
As they come round and round again;
Where the workers pray
With their tools all day
In sunshine and shadow and rain.

“And I bid them tell
Of the crops they sell
And speak of the work they have done;
I speed every man
In his hope and plan
And follow his day with the sun;
And grasses and trees,
The birds and the bees
I know and feel ev'ry one.

“And out of it all
As the seasons fall
I build my great temple alway;
I point to the skies
But my footstone lies
In the commonplace work of the day;
For I preach the worth
Of the native earth—
To love and to work is to pray.”

PASTORAL EVANGELISM.

BENJAMIN F. ALDRICH.

The shepherd ministry of the servant of God is vastly larger, immeasurably more than the bringing of immediate relief and present good cheer to those who can be regarded as members of his flock. His calling and work must mean to some, and ought to mean in greater or less degree to all, a very real touch of the life of God upon their lives. The almost appalling fact is that every true minister of Christ must stand to some people for God. A warrant for this staggering assumption is found in the fact that the message came to a man trained and disciplined in the greatest university then known, and trained also out in the loneliness of the mountain of God, that "He (your brother) will be to you for a mouth and you will be to Him for God." We are also told that a *man* shall be "A hiding place from the storm." This is the great silencing and humbling fact of our ministry as pastors, that we are to be some people as God, bringing to them out of our personal associations and contact and relationships, the truth of God, the righteousness of God, the love of God and the real impact of the life of God, and herein is the deep secret of our Evangelism as Pastors.

1. This must be so in the ordinary ministries and daily life of the pastor, the house-to-house visitation, the occasional call on the sick or distressed, the moment of striking hands and exchange of glances in the place of business, the mix-up on the gymnasium floor, the walk over country fields, and all personal contacts socially and otherwise. In this ordinary, every-day touch and go, and common give and take experience there should be some deeper and more vital influence than that which shows upon the surface. This deeper something need not always be spoken, but it must *be* if the ministry is true to its high calling. There must be daily and hourly and momentarily the real touch of the life enabled by the Spirit of God, and that touch must be felt and known as an invitation to higher planes and wider ranges of being where the personality comes to its best in the fellowship of the divine. The personal fellowship of the pastor with his people should focus the thought, clarify the vision, strengthen the purpose and crystallize the will for the things of God.

2. There are situations in which God Himself has opened the door of the heart of that one to whom evangelistic appeal comes naturally from the pastor, and the pastor has failed ut-

terly to catch the far-reaching significance of his ministry unless he quietly enters that door into the deep sanctities of the soul which, in this condition, may receive untold treasures out of the divine opulence, which perhaps it will never be prepared to receive again. It is a wonderful thing, and yet not so wonderful in the light of our faith in the over-brooding watchcare and love, that when a soul has received upon itself the downward stroke of an unknown power and little understood providence, it does not cry out in rebellion, but in the darkness and in its prostration only pleads for light and help. The pastor rises to his full opportunity only when he recognizes the door of calamity, so dark on this side, as a door full of opportunity, glowing with light and life, leading into higher life, and broader experience, and increasing power for real constructive work in God's kingdom upon the earth. A mother has lost a single child of her heart and will never have another one given to her in this life, but she is led into a beautiful service of teaching a class of little children, or superintending the Junior Endeavor, or of gathering through the cradle roll a multitude of little children whose sweet innocent faces become to her more than models for a Raphael or Murillo glory of angels. A man has lost out of his pulsing companionship a manly son and the great void in his life can be filled by an impulse to serve men in the spirit of Christ in the name of that son. A strong man can feel a growing business enterprise, in which he has planted the best strength of his life, fall down about his head like a house of cards, and discover out of this calamity the great and abiding significance of the Spirit. When a man has slipped and fallen, and is utterly cast down, and has arisen again with a wound so deep that if it ever heals it will heal with a scar, he may be made to see that this experience may be utilized in the power of God to save scores and hundreds of others from the poignancy from that same experience. One who has disregarded the fundamental loyalties about home, and childhood, and community welfare, and great religious forces of the world, may in a time in which by his own action he has isolated himself from all these great helpful things, be brought to see clearly their vital power, and their essential significance to anything that can be called real life.

3. The whole parish organization in its Bible school and choirs and clubs and guilds may be used as various means of specializing among the various ages and various capacities in the developing of character which may come to its best in Christ-likeness. Blessed is the church which has a choir master who

will co-operate with the pastor in these things, putting prayer and devotion and real evangelistic appeal in the training for public worship, and in putting forth the results of that training in a real leadership of the congregation in the spirit of devotion. And the pastor who neglects his opportunity to reveal this sense of the meaning of sacred music in the rehearsal and in the public services has lost a distinct opportunity which is far more significant than any evangelistic sermon which he may otherwise preach from a public platform. Even in the organized and supervised play of children and young people, without dealing out homilies and drawing morals, but just as a simple example of Christlike virility and manliness, he can emphasize the truth of the sacredness of the body, and the necessity for its cleanliness and strength and steadiness as a house for the indwelling of God's Spirit. No matter at what wide ranges the pastor may come in contact with any of his people the thought paths, the ideal paths, the motive paths, all should lead certainly up to Christ as a master of men and the Savior of the world.

4. The pastor must be wise to bring in this personal relationship, either by word or personal influence, the message that shall be understood, as well as needed, by the person to whom his life makes its appeal. When Paul talked to the Jews he strongly emphasized the Hebrew prophecies which Christ was fulfilling, and traced Hebrew history with Christ as its climacteric expression. When he talked with the Athenians on Mars Hill he mentioned neither Hebrew prophecy nor Hebrew history, but went direct to the Athenian mind with regard to their honest worship of the unknown God, and the great fundamental teaching of one of their own poets. The most important part of the pastor's relationship to his people is that of finding common ground with the one with whom he is to deal, so that from this common ground he may find a point of departure to the higher truths, and the deeper experiences, and the broader ranges of life into which that person has not yet entered. He must know how to tell the greatest truths of the universe, give exposition of the profoundest experiences of life, point out the superlative ideals of the spirit in the language of the previous experience of the one with whom his life has come into close relationship. For this superlative task the pastor's life must be saturated with the Gospel, and energized by the Spirit of Christ. In his very silences Christ must speak through him.

THE HYMNODY OF EVANGELISM.

H. A. SMITH.

It is an interesting fact that the typical evangelistic hymn came not from the Methodist revivals of the middle of the eighteenth century, with the Wesleys as chief singers, but rather from the Church of England under the inspiration of a woman hymn writer and her crowning hymn, "Just as I am without one plea." Many Wesley hymns were objective, stolid and combative, written in an age of tremendous religious upheaval, when hymn singing meant outshouting a rival band or a roistering crowd of tin can serenaders, when "Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim," was used to break new ground, a forerunner of the Word itself, a two-edged sword in church controversy.

The lay evangelism of the last half of the nineteenth century produced the so-called "Gospel Hymns," hymns of repentance and the call of the Christ, songs of surrender and consecration. Look at this list:

Charlotte Elliot—"Just as I am"

Frances Havergal—"Take my life and let it be"

Cecil Alexander—"Jesus calls us o'er the tumult"

P. P. Bliss—"Let the lower lights be burning"

Annie Hawks—"I need Thee every hour"

Fanny Crosby—"Jesus, keep me near the cross"

Elizabeth Clephane—"There were ninety and nine"

Some one has raised the question; is the Gospel Song a true hymn? A hymn, according to St. Augustine and all church men since his day, is a poem in praise or prayer to God, to be sung in public assembly, by all the people. God Himself is the ultimate objective point, not some hearer, some sinner, as in "Why do you tarry, my brother?" And this brings us to the seeming weakness of our present day hymn singing. It is morbid, introspective, spineless. There is too much stock taking of sins, too much turning of the eyes inward. Let us rather look up to God in hymns of praise and look out to man in hymns of fellowship. The old responsive readings were too largely of the penitential sort, meditations of an intimate nature, not outstanding festal Psalms and selected doxologies and votive songs. Let the note of praise, of trust, of ultimate triumph ring strong and true in all public worship, in the hymn singing, in the Bible readings, in the prayers.

Gospel Hymns have come to stay, they have a distinct mis-

sion in winning lives to Christ. Some are strong and reasonable both as to words and music and there is the ubiquitous "refrain" that will swing them into popularity everywhere. However as a class they are unsuited to a growing Church, for they deal with one phase only of Christian experience, namely conversion, or they whisk one away to heaven. There is no intermediate ground, no growth in the graces of the spirit, no unfolding life.

Are you, my reader, using a book in your church service, left by some good evangelist after his series of meetings, using it for the nurturing of your young converts, when they ought to be getting better food? And shame on the irreverent spirit of the "hippity hop" hymn tune. On a recent Sunday in one of our prominent Bible schools the boys and girls were stepping off the "tango" to the rhythm of the last hymn. Beware of the gusto with which children sing certain catchy tunes, or the enthusiasm that pervades great audiences in the singing of certain revival hymns. Little of it is spiritual rapture, it is mere physical exhilaration. It is often said that the mission of congregational singing is to have everybody sing and sing heartily, and yet hundreds of "enraptured souls" sing popular hymns without the slightest thought of worship. It is rather the enjoyment one feels in marching down the street to a brass band.

Both hymns and hymn tunes are too full of cheap sentiment these days. They are sugary, they are disgustingly familiar. They treat sacred subjects with callous intimacy. I have heard great audiences sing "I love Him, I love Him," to the tune of "Old Black Joe," until I could stand it no longer, and I marched my choir children out of hearing of such languishing, *con amore* singing. Go slow on the hymns you announce as your evangel. Read carefully through every hymn you purpose using in Sunday school or Church. See that it does not overstate the case. And if there are fragile hymns of intensive make up that are favorites, take them to the quiet of your own chamber as meditation and prayers, do not parade them in public assembly. "O Jesus, Thou art standing," belongs anywhere than at the beginning of an evening service, when late comers are tramping in, when there is confusion, and when the atmosphere of worship is still in the forming. Some hymns are good square timbers, made to "rough it" and "fill in" until the "babble of life's angry voices dies in hushed stillness," and one stands in the presence of God Himself.





